Part one

The History of City Hall

CARBONDALE'S FIRST CITY HALL. This wooden building, in the Greek Revival style of architecture, was erected in 1852, and served as the seat of the government of Carbondale until February 14, 1869, when it was destroyed by a fire.

(Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of articles by S. Robert Powell of Carbondale on the history of Carbondale's three City Halls that will be published in the NEWS.)

On March 15, 1851, the charter of the city of Carbondale, which was drawn up by the Honorable Lewis Jones, was approved by an act of the Assembly, and Carbondale became an incorporated city with four wards.

The following city officers were elected on March 21, 1851: **Mayor**, James Archbald; **Select Council**, Joseph Benjamin, Peter Campbell, Thomas Gillespie, Michael Flynn; **Common Council**, Thomas Sweet, Daniel Scurry, William Ball, Patrick Moffitt, James Clarkson, W.W Bronson, Edward Jones, Alexander Bryden, Richard Howarth, Terence Powderly, Patrick Connor, Daniel Thatcher; **Prosecuting Attorney**, George W. Perkins; **Clerk of the Mayor's Court**, William Brennan; **Treasurer**, Lewis Pughe; **Assessor**, Philip Wilson; **Auditors**, William H. Richmond, James Stott, Thomas Voyle; **Poor Masters**, John Campbell, John Lee.

For the first year of its existence, the city government was housed provisionally in the Methodist Episcopal Church and in the Carbondale House. It was in that church, for example, that the oath of office was administered on March 26, 1851 to the mayor, the clerk of court, and the prosecuting attorney, by the Honorable William Jessup, president judge of the judicial district. Similarly, when the Select Council organized and chose Peter Campbell as president and Michael Flynn as clerk, and when the Common Council organized and chose James Clarkson as chairman and William Ball as secretary, they did so in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

In 1852, Carbondale's first City Hall was erected at a cost of $3,000. (This is the building that is shown in the line engraving.) This wooden building, constructed in the Greek Revival style, served as Carbondale City Hall for 17 years. It burned to the ground on February 14, 1869, in a fire that originated in the cell of Owen Coleman, who was imprisoned for drunkenness.

The exact location of this building has not yet been learned. It was erected in 1852, and does not appear on the map of Carbondale that was drawn in 1851. Given the fact that it burned in 1869, it does not appear on the 1873 map of Carbondale that is given on pages 46-47 of the "Atlas of Luzerne County Pennsylvania from actual surveys by and under the Direction of D. G. Beers." This 1873 map, which was engraved by Worley & Bracher and printed by E. Bourquin, was published by A. Pomeroy and Co., Philadelphia.

It is known, however, that the 1852 City Hall was erected either on the lot were the present City Hall stands or in Memorial Park, directly across North Main Street from the present City Hall. We do know, in addition, that before this wooden City Hall was built, a barn that used to stand on "the parade ground" (which included the lot where the present City Hall stands as well as the lot taken up by Memorail Park) was removed.

It was in Carbondale's first City Hall that the mayor's court, one of the earliest judicial bodies established in northeastern Pennsylvania, was held. This explains why this building is sometimes referred to as the Court House. The mayor's court, which was abolished on December 31, 1875, was provided for by the city's charter. This court was styled the recorder's court, and it was presided over by the president judge of the judicial district sitting as recorder, assisted by the mayor and some of the aldermen as might be present.

This court had concurrent jurisdiction with the county courts, except in oyer and terminer cases, and in cases belonging to the orphan's court. Its jurisdiction extended at times over Fell, Carbondale, Blakely and Greenfield Townships. The first session of the mayor's court was held in the Methodist Episcopal Church on May 13, 1851, with Judge Jessup presiding. No business was done at this term, except to provide for the drawing of juries. A grand jury was impaneled for the term beginning September 8, 1851, of which Judson W. Burnham was foreman. Courts were held in the Methodist Episcopal Church until 1852, and a room at the Carbondale House, Jonathan Gore, proprietor, was used as a jury room. From 1852 to 1869, this court sat in Carbondale's first City Hall.

It is interesting to note that at least one other building erected in the city of Carbondale during the 1850s was in the Greek Revival style: the wooden Berean Baptist Church that was built by the Baptists on their lot on North Church Street between the Methodist Episcopal and the Catholic Churches. This building was dedicated on November 29, 1859, during the pastorate of Edward L. Bailey. It served as the Berean Baptist Church until 1888, when. during the pastorate of Thomas E. Jepson, the Baptists held their last services there on December 2.

On April 26, 1888, excavations were begun for the stone Berean Baptist Church that stood at the corner of North Church Street and Lincoln Avenue. This new building, which was dedicated on April 1, 1889, burned on August 21, 1968. The present Berean Baptist Church in Carbondale was dedicated on September 13, 1970, during the seventeen and one-half year pastorate of Arthur W. Meneely.